ARAB AND SWAHILI DANCES AND CEREMONIES.

By R. Skene.

The Razha Dance.

535 171 702 562 The Razha was originally a war dance practised by the Arabs in Arabia prior to starting out on a raid. It originated at Manga in Muscat, and is danced with naked swords, the object being to get the muscles of the sword arm into training. The Hatharmut or Hadramaut Arabs also dance it, but use daggers instead of swords.

The dancers, who of course are all men, stand in two rows facing each other, or in one row. They advance slowly a few inches at each step, keeping time to the drumming. The sword is held perpendicularly in the right hand, the fore-arm being at a right angle with the body. While holding the hilt of the sword in a perfect balance between the thumb and the first and second fingers, the base of the hilt is given a smart blow with the wrist so as to make the blade of the sword quiver. Being highly polished and made of fine supple steel, the quivering blade reflects the light in a most effective manner. This can only be done with the long straight double-edged sword of Southern Arabia and not with the scimitar-like blade used further north, owing to the thickness of the latter weapon.

535 534 The music for the Razha dance is supplied by a drum called a *chapuo*, cylindrical in shape, covered with goat skin on both ends. It is about eighteen inches long by eight in diameter, and is played on both ends with the hands, while hung across the waist of the drummer by a cord round the neck. A bass drum is also used, called a *vumi* of the same shape as the *chapuo*, but larger, being two to three feet long and fifteen inches in diameter. It is beaten in the same manner as the *chapuo*.

Anyone who knows how to dance can join in. No refreshments are served.

The Shibwani Dance.

535 562 575 This is danced by the Arabs of Mkalle or Makulla, without any weapons, and by men only, who attend by invitation. It usually takes place at a wedding festival, in which case food and coffee are served round, or at any other general rejoicing. The dancers stand in two lines facing each other about eight or ten paces apart. They bend the knee and bow the body slightly forward to each other in unison and in time to the beating of the drums. They also sing a chorus song and keep time by clapping their hands together.

12: Skene G,B-4 (no date) 1917 MM2 Hadhramaut MM2

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The orchestra consists of a *vumi* and a *chapuo* drum, both described above (see Razha dance). A treble drum called a *marwasi* is also used. It is much smaller than the *vumi* and is only about eight inches long by eight inches in diameter. It is covered with goat skin on both ends and is beaten with the flat of the right hand while held in the left by a piece of cord. The drumming is accompanied by cymbals of brass called *vitasa*, which are placed on the ground one above another and struck with pieces of stick, one in each hand, so as to make the cymbals rattle together. In lieu of the cymbals, a metal rod is sometimes used bent into a triangle exactly the same shape as the triangles used in European military bands, and played in the same manner.

The Shebwáni is sometimes danced in the afternoon but more often at night. It has no mystical meaning.

THE SHERHA DANCE.

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This is danced by the Hatharmut Arabs to celebrate a wedding or for any other cause of rejoicing. The dancers, who are all men, and who attend by invitation, stand round in a large circle some ten paces in diameter and sway the body slightly from side to side, while clapping their hands in time to the music. Presently two men come out of the ring and dance towards each other, and then backwards and forwards in a sort of "chassé croisé" for about ten minutes, and then they retire from the ring and are replaced by two others. Sometimes two couples dance in the ring at the same time.

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The music is supplied by a wind instrument much resembling a clarionet or a French "musette," but the mouthpiece consists of two reeds instead of one, and the tone is very similar to that of the chanter of Scotch bag-pipes. This instrument is called a *zumari*, and supplies the tune accompanied by a *vumi* drum described above (see Razha dance) and by a *msondo* drum standing about four feet high with a diameter of about eighteen inches. It is cylindrical in shape and is covered by a goat-skin at the top end only, the bottom end being open. It is played with both hands in an upright position, resting on the ground.

No refreshments are served at a Sherha dance except if it is held to celebrate a wedding, in which case *pilaw* is served and coffee also.

KINANDA DANCE.

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This dance partakes of the nature of a performance for the amusement of the onlookers and is held indoors. Two male performers hold a silk scarf or woollen shawl between them and repeatedly advance towards the audience and retire, while executing various steps and figures. They then face each other and dance in that position, executing with their arms and bodies slow and graceful movements. Then they face the audience and advance and retire and so on till they become tired.

12: Skene G.B-4 (no date) 1917 MM2 Hadhramaut MM2

The musical instruments consist of the small *morusasi* drum described above (see Shebwani dance) and of a *kinanda* which supplies the tune. The latter is a string instrument of the nature of a guitar and is played in much the same way. It usually has seven strings, six of which used formerly to be made of sheep gut, but are now made of twisted silk. The seventh is the bass string and is made of copper wire.

Although not considered altogether reprehensible by austere Mohammedans, the "Kinanda" entertainment is looked upon as rather advanced, if not fast.

Sometimes the dancing is dispensed with and the entertainment is reduced to solo songs accompanied by the *kinanda*. It then assumes a more respectable character, though still not entirely approved of.

Being held indoors, the audience naturally come by invitation only. Refreshments consisting of coffee, sherbet and *halwa* (Turkish Delight) are handed round.

The Zamil Dance.

This is danced by the Hatharmut Arabs, and generally takes place either by day or by night, in front of the house of some exalted person to whom it is intended to pay compliment or to show respect. It is in fact a sort of serenade, but is also danced at weddings.

The dancers form up in one or more lines facing the house of the person in whose honour it is being held. The leader of the dance starts singing a solo, usually a song of praise to the person in question, and the remainder take up the chorus, which they accompany by rhythmic clapping of hands and swaying of the body. It is not by invitation, and anyone may join in. No drums or musical instruments are used and no refreshments partaken of, except at weddings. This dance has no mystical meaning.

The Chama Dance.

This may be called a faction dance owing to the element of competition which enters into it in regard to some other faction which has also organized a dance. It is danced by Swahili men, who dress up in their best clothes and wear Arab daggers and swords borrowed from those of their friends who have them. They do their best to make as fine and as big a show as possible in order to eclipse the dance of the other competing faction. Formerly the dance was accompanied by a feast, and still is in the Lamu District, where the factions vie with each other as to the number of cattle they can afford to kill. In 1912, one faction at the village of Mkunumbi (Witu Sultanate) was known to kill thirty head of cattle to cap the twenty-five head which another faction had killed a few days previously.[1] Needless to say that such waste is impossible in the Malindi District where cattle are scarce, and where the dancers only compete in matters of personal adornment and the number of followers. Faction feeling sometimes runs high, and if two competing dances happen to be taking place on the same night it is not unheard of for one party to attack the other with sticks.

[1] [SEE NOTE ON P. 434 — ANALYST.]

12: Skene G,B-4 (no date) 1917 MM2 Hadhramaut MM2

535 191 The dance itself resembles the Arab Razha dance, the men standing in a row and jerking sticks in the same manner that the Arabs jerk their swords, one of which may sometimes be seen in the hand of a Swahili dancer of the Chama.

536 534 517 The orchestra consists of a *tumi* drum, a *chapuo* drum, a pair of cymbals or *vitasa*, a *zumari* or clarionet, all of which are described above (see Razha dance, Shebwani dance and Sherha dance), also a tambourine called a *tari* or *pari*. This is sometimes ornamented with loose brass discs that jingle together, as in the Spanish tambourine. The goat-skin is pegged to the wooden frame and is tightened by stuffing a more or less thick cord between the skin and the frame.

The Chama is usually danced in a public place and no invitation is necessary. Anyone may join in who feels so inclined. No refreshments are served nowadays in the Malindi District at a Chama dance, which has no mystical significance.

The Shangwi Dance.

535 562 578 554 The dance is identical with the Chama and is danced by the winning faction in the Chama competition, which is judged by the "*wazee wa Ngoma*," or elders of the dance, men who are accustomed to take the lead in dances, in other words "masters of the ceremonies." The winning faction proceed to the house of the organiser of the opposition dance and dance the Shangwi in front of it. He is supposed to take this as a compliment, and passes round a scent bottle and sometimes takes part in the dancing himself. The Shangwi has no mystical significance and is usually danced at night with the same orchestra as for the Chama.

Ngoma ya Fimbo. (Walking-stick dance.)

535 575 552 562 The Ngoma Ya Fimbo is danced at Swahili wedding feasts, and at Swahili circumcision feasts. The dancers, all men, assemble by invitation and form a ring in the open near the house of the host, all carrying sticks, hence the name of the dance. While those in the ring balance themselves slowly and rhythmically from one foot to the other, two of their number go into the centre and make passes at each other with their sticks as if they were swords, in time to the drumming. After a few minutes of this, another pair go into the centre of the circle and perform in the same manner while the first two retire, and so on to the end of the dance, which usually takes place by day.

535 534 Cigarettes and betel nuts are passed round to the dancers. The music is supplied by *tumi* and *chapuo* drums described above (see Razha dance) by *vitasa* or cymbals (see Shebwani dance), and by a *zumari* or clarionet (see Sherha dance). In a temporary pavilion of palm-thatch erected close by, a number of young slave women generally stand holding buffalo horns in their left hands, which they strike with small sticks in time to the drumming.

This dance has no mystic significance and is merely a form of rejoicing.

12: Shene G,B-4 (no date) 1917 MM2 Hadhramaut MM2

The Mwaribe Dance.

A dance for women only, which takes place indoors if danced by free women, and out of doors if the dancers are slaves. The women stand in a circle singing songs and clapping their hands in time to a triangle described above (see Shebwani dance). One dancer then advances, executing various fancy steps, towards another dancer in front of whom she stamps her foot and then retires, still executing fancy steps, to her place in the ring. The person in front of whom the first dancer stamped her foot then advances from her place in the ring in the same manner as the first dancer and stamps her foot in front of a third, who comes out in her turn, and so on.

The songs are led by one of the women, who sings the solo while the remainder join in the chorus. No drums are used.

This dance often takes place at wedding festivals when betel nut and cigarettes are handed round with tea. Then towards the end of the entertainment meat and rice are eaten. It may also be danced on the occasion of other rejoicings, the special time of year for having it being the first week of the North-east monsoon, that is, in November and December.

This Mwaribe dance has no mystic meaning.

The Mwasha Dance.

This is also a woman's dance and is of Bajuni origin, its introduction to the Malindi District from Witu having begun about four years ago. If the dancers are free women they dance indoors; if they are slaves the dance takes place in the open, but always by invitation.

The guests line up in two or three rows, one behind the other, and move forward slowly an inch or two at each step, while they jerk their chins forward and move their shoulders in time to the drums. When the front row gets up to the wall of the room, or to the limits of the dancing-floor, all the dancers face about and move slowly as before in the opposite direction, the front row becoming the back one.

If it takes place indoors, no men are allowed to be present except the orchestra, consisting of the performers on a *vumi* described above (see Razha dance) on a *tari* or tambourine (see Chama dance), and on a *rumari* or clarionet (see Sherha dance).

This dance, which has an undoubted touch of savagery about it, may perhaps be derived from the Somalis, and tends to work the dancers up into a nervous state. It is often danced in competition with another dance faction. No refreshments are served.

It has no mystic significance and appears to be indulged in when the general physical condition of the performers calls for a nervous outlet of some sort.

are given vent to by singing and running round in a circle, in time to the beating of a drum, very much in the same manner as children do. No invitations are given, and anyone may join in. No refreshments are handed round.

The Mdema Dance.

This also is an importation from Nyasaland (see Ki-Nyasa dance), and is danced by the slave population only, either by day or by night. It is exactly like the Ki-Nyasa dance described above, with the exception that no iron bells are strapped round the knees, and it is, if possible, of a simpler character, the Ki-Nyasa being in truth simple enough. Like the latter it is merely a vent for high animal spirits. No refreshments are given and no invitations are necessary.

The Kindimba.

The Kindimba is not a dance, but a musical entertainment into which enters a slight element of the mystical. It is only given by people of the slave class in fulfilment of a vow. Any person who greatly desires something or some event to come to pass makes a vow to give a Kindimba if his wish is fulfilled.

Invitations are issued to his friends by the person who is giving the entertainment, and they assemble at his house. The men and women sit together either indoors if there is room, or else in the open. Songs are sung by a leader, the other guests joining in the chorus, and clapping their hands in time to the singing, which is accompanied by a small drum called a *ngumbaro*, very like a *marwasi* (see Shebwani dance), with this difference that only one end is covered with a goat skin, while in the *marwasi* both ends are covered. The other end, which is open, is made to rest on the chest or stomach of the player, who performs upon it in that position with both hands. Hard grains of maize are placed in dry gourds of various sizes, and these are rattled in time to the singing.

The entertainment partakes of the nature of thanksgiving, and frivolous songs are therefore avoided. Although not exactly of a religious character, a certain amount of superstition is far from being foreign to the Kindimba.

The Vugo.

At a wedding, a procession of women is often formed in the evening after dark to parade the streets, and is called a Vugo. The women sing in chorus to the sound of buffalo horns beaten with short sticks. No men are allowed to take part in the procession, which is both an Arab and a Swahili custom.

The Kintago Dance.[1]

This is a Swahili medicine-dance usually held outside the town in a plantation on a moonless night. No artificial lights are allowed. Swahilis who have any

[1] [SEE NOTE ON P. 434 -- ANALYST.]

against the two non-Moslem travelers, we started in the direction of Hajarēn. It was a silent struggle against thirst and heat. At last we were standing at the foot of the mountain on which Hajarēn lies. It must be a very old town. For a land of warfare its position is also very favorable. In the midst of the broad valley, on the top of a steep rocky hill, which stands there alone and commands the entire valley, they naturally preferred to build a town in former times. We were at the end of our strength as we worked our way up, in through the gate of Hajarēn, and by many narrow, steep streets to a plain house where a friend of the Dutch was said to be living. He might well have been startled when he saw the caravan of his unexpected visitors. It was a long time before the doors were opened. Luck was not with us. A double wedding feast was just being celebrated, and the women had to vacate the room in which we were to be received. Our host was not rich, but he put himself and all that he had at our disposal. When he saw how weary we were and how we longed for rest, a room was made ready for us higher up, where we could sleep until the meal was ready. We were under the roof of a Dutch subject. I remember with deep gratitude the oriental hospitality which cannot be praised enough, and of which we saw here a brilliant example. Thoroughly refreshed we started in the afternoon for Meshed. We had to close our ranks in doing this, for here was the neutral zone between the regions of the āl-Qa'ētī and the āl-Kathīr. Everything here indicated warfare and highway robbery. Meshed is a little place built in the midst of the desert, solely for the purpose of preventing highway robbery. The trade route from the Wādī Hadramaut through the Wādī Dō'an to the coast is safe since Meshed was established. Here we came into the jurisdiction of the family al-'Attās, and our troubles and anxieties came to an end. We were taken into a beautiful, spotlessly clean guest house, and were welcomed as honored guests by the cultured son of the absent governor.

21: Thomas F6 (no date) 1982 MM2 Hadhramaut MM2

a woman's hand as we should in a hand shake is a shameful overture. The stranger meeting a woman would saluté her with outstretched hand and a smart tap of the finger tips only. 576 832

Generally speaking, the woman in South Arabia has more liberty than in any other part I know. If there are no love matches in our sense of the word, ladies do make *gasidas* which are passed on for those for whom they are intended by word of mouth. Elsewhere no woman would dare sing—it would be unthinkable for instance in Oman, where she would be beaten as a hussy, but I often heard in these mountains the choruses of women at the water-holes, and very charming they sounded. 562

Marriage in South Arabia requires a *gadhi*, but divorce does not. A man has only to tire of his wife and say *Talag* three times, whereupon she must betake herself to her father's house with no alimony beyond the original marriage price—wherefore she is a careful woman. If she is tired of him she must return his marriage portion, and her family the purchase price. It is a rule amongst them that a woman who has gone blind is never divorced. A really expensive bride may cost 20 cows, say 400 Maria Theresa dollars, but they can be much cheaper, ranging downwards to one cow or even 10 dollars. The groom and bride representatives (father or brothers) descend to the plain where a *gadhi* legalizes the marriage, and on returning, the women folk of the bride, preceded by men, conduct her to the cave of her spouse. The only cave furniture will be a small carpet bought for the occasion. The bridegroom will slaughter a couple of cows to make a feast and invite all to it, but beyond the men's *rabat* (a monotonous chant of the mountains) there is no dancing and joy-making such as characterize rites of circumcision. 585 586 583 [782]

With these tribes child-birth seems to be easy for the woman. She works up to a day or two before the child arrives. She bears it under a tree in the open or in a cave with the possible assistance of her mother or sister, the position being said to be not unlike that taken up by a sprinter for the start of a race. They have no beds, there is no lying in and she is generally fit for work the next day. 844

Illegitimacy is almost unknown in spite of the greater freedom enjoyed. Early and universal marriage is the reason. Transgression for a girl is regarded differently here than elsewhere in Arabia. In Oman an unmarried expectant mother, or a wife committing adultery, would on discovery be murdered by her father or brother—not by her husband. Nothing would be done to the man who had seduced her. Here the girl would be turned out of the tribe and have to fend for herself, and her male relations would wreak revenge on some female relation of the seducer if they could not pursue and wound him with a sword. 848 837 684 [628]

CAVES AND HOUSES.

In the mountains men live in caves during the summer monsoon rain, and under trees at other times. They are not nomads and caves are private possessions. In the coastal plain itself, where man makes a house to shelter himself, the first thing he does is to hammer four nails into the respective corners of the house, which are supposed to keep out the Evil Eye. When completed he slaughters a lamb on the threshold as a sacrifice to his walls enduring— 342 [754] 782 342

24:Meulen and Wissmann T-S (1931)1932 MM2 Hadhramaut MM2

6. ALONG THE BEACH TO ESH-SHIHR.

That night in Sheḥēr there was not much sleep, for a wedding was being celebrated in the village square below us. Several houses are lighted up, and, from our vantage-point high up above them, we can see the feasting that is going on there. Afterwards by the light of gasoline lamps there is dancing in the square; the men and women stand facing each other in long rows, which approach each other with rythmical stamping of feet and clapping of hands and then again retreat. All unite in the singing of a monotonous refrain, the constant repetition of one and the same melody. The actual song is recited by a single person. They all know the old songs and enjoy taking part in them and joining in the rising enthusiasm caused by their refrain. Sweat pours down the naked chests of the men, but it is nearly morning before their energy is exhausted and the festal joy quietens down.

Our driver wakes us up with a toot from his horn in front of the castle, before it is yet light. He knows that we must do the journey to esh-Shiḥr and back, by way of the coast, before high tide.

Our host accompanies us. The road runs along the east bank of the wâdī right up to the coast, which is at a distance of only a few miles. On the beach lie the heavy boats of the fishermen and of the men who collect guano. There are drying-places for fish close to some huts: we could smell them that night in Sheḥēr. The guano is conveyed by camel from here to Ghēl Bā Wazīr, there to be used for manuring the fields. The shore is very like the sandy beach of Holland and there are even dunes with some vegetation, which are, however, not more than 20—30 feet in height. On the beach there are armies of crabs, which, at our approach, try to escape either in the direction of the sea or towards the sand-dunes, where cone-shaped heaps of sand flank the entrance to their long spiral passages, which lead underground. The ridge of dunes, which

24:Meulen and Wissmann T-3 (1931)1932 MM2 Hadhramaut MM2

its fine strategic position once commanded the great route from the coast to Ḥaḍramaut. Within the gate the streets also mount steeply. The town gives an impression of decay; there are few tall or fine houses, the white colour of prosperity is to be seen on hardly a single one of them; the town is grey-brown as the mountain against which it stands.

We stop in front of a double house that is built over a small side-street. Sayyid Muḥammad bin Sālim bin ʿAbdarraḥmān Al Qāf, the man to whom we were given an introduction by our host in Dōʿan, is said to live here. The letter is taken in, the door closed again, and we wait in the shadow of the narrow, overarched street. Time passes and we ask ourselves anxiously whether the *Efrendjīs* are perhaps not welcome in this house. No, that is not the case, but a double wedding is being celebrated at this moment, and the house is therefore full of women, who have to be removed and shut up, before our company can be allowed to enter. At last this stage is reached and we are taken to an apartment which shows signs of having been very much inhabited. It is warm there and not clean, and, although we already fill the room, a number of inquisitive people force themselves in. The master of the house himself as well as his snivelling small son appear to have economised water for all other purposes than washing. But his friendly glance and hearty welcome make everything all right at once.

It is perhaps here timely to pay grateful tribute to the wonderful hospitality of the Arabs. Who, in the West, would hide his disappointment at having a wedding feast broken in upon by a whole caravan of tired and hungry men? Who amongst us would immediately throw open his whole house to the travellers, "the sons of the road", himself bring water to slake their thirst, and immediately prepare food to strengthen them?

Life is democratic here. In the reception-room, which is chock-full, sit slaves, servants, children and master all together, who drink out of the same bowl and pour out coffee